Origins of the word Taino

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Origins of the word "taíno"

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PURPOSE:

This paper is intended to shed light on the origins of the words "*taíno*" and "*nitaíno*," which have been used, respectively, to represent the most dominant Indigenous group of the Caribbean region during the contact period (beginning in 1492) and a supposed ruling class in the Taíno hierarchy. The target audience of this paper is laymen interested in the subject. That said, we believe that scholars may also benefit as we raise key questions and observations about Caribbean and Circum-Caribbean languages based on our research and interviews with Native Arawakan speakers.

Christopher Columbus's travel logs offer us a miniscule glimpse of the very complex Caribbean world in which the Taíno people lived in 1492. Although biased and not very accurate, his logs are the earliest records of Indigenous Caribbean peoples and their cultures that we have, including what he noted about the Indigenous languages. Columbus was diligent in his descriptions of the things he saw, peoples he met, foods to which he was introduced, and words that he heard; however, his logs are inundated with mistakes, mostly based on cultural biases. For example, the Admiral wrote that the island of Cuba was a continent. On another occasion, he misunderstood and believed that the Cibao Valley was an island.

Europeans, for the most part, were unable to truly communicate with the natives, using mostly sign language and guesswork. This is particularly true during the initial voyages, which invariably set the stage for colonization. In some cases, Spaniards, not possessing names for things they encountered that were new to them, invented names based on things back in Europe that seemed similar.

Columbus believed he had landed on islands off the coast of India. As early as October 17, 1492, he began calling the Natives "*Indios,*" from which the name "Indian" derives. Subsequently all the Native Peoples of the Western Hemisphere came to be called Indians. In the Caribbean in particular, people are still referred to as *Indio* or *Indio*-colored. Caribbean Indians came to be known as the Taíno. This name has been steeped in controversy since its exact origins are unknown. Some claim that the name was coined by the Spaniards from a Taínan word they overheard, "*nitaíno,*" which they interpreted as meaning "noblemen." Others believe that this name was first coined in the 1830s by C.S. Rafinuesque-Schmaltz, a self-educated Frenchman who wrote extensively on zoology and Meso-American languages. Still others maintain that "*Taíno*" is indeed the tribal name of the most dominant Indigenous group of the Caribbean. That is a claim, however, that is difficult to back up, since the people we call Taíno today were not one ethnic group, but rather composites of many different Indigenous, Arawakan-speaking peoples who had blended their cultural traits, values and beliefs, and their genes together in the region for more than 6,000 years.

Our aim is to explore some of these theories and offer our own interpretation of the words "*taíno*" and "*nitaíno*." In addition, we hope to demonstrate that the modern name Taíno and its historical variants, "*nitayno*" or "*tayno,*" were the words the Indigenous peoples of the region used to identify themselves Caribbean-wide and are, indeed, applicable. Most importantly, we believe that the words did not refer to a noble class.
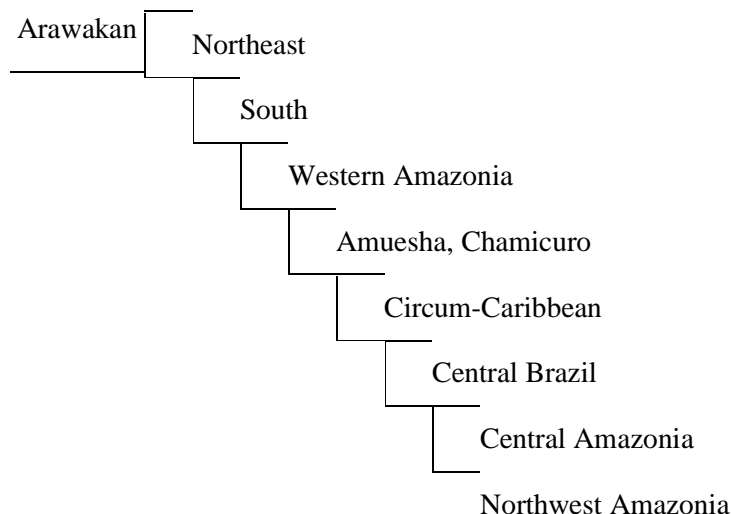
Our Classic Taíno ancestors did not have a written language, thus when studying the lexicon, morphology, and pronunciation of their languages, we can only rely on the various Spanish and other European spellings and interpretations or study their language comparatively using related Indigenous languages. Chroniclers, originating in various parts of Spain or Europe, undoubtedly spelled the Indigenous words that they heard phonetically via the vocal prisms and tones to which they were accustomed. Thus the same Indigenous word sounded different to a German speaker than it did to a French or Spanish speaker. Subsequently, the various European chroniclers also spelled the Indigenous words differently.

The Arawak Language

Family: Macro, Arawakan, Maipuran

Divisions: Northern and Southern Ta-Arawakan

Walker & Ribeiro,[1] using Bayesian computational phylogenetics (a method of tracing evolutionary history), classify the Arawakan languages as follows:

Arawakan
   Northeast
     South
       Western Amazonia
         Amuesha, Chamicuro
           Circum-Caribbean
             Central Brazil
               Central Amazonia
               Northwest Amazonia

Arawakan is the most widely spread super-language family group in South America. The language is distributed from Central America down through South America and throughout the Caribbean islands. The language is absent only in Chile, Uruguay, and Ecuador. Arawakan is even more extensive due to its strong linguistic connections to the Maipuran languages, which were found to be closely related to Arawak in 1783 by the Italian priest Filippo Gilii.

The Arawakan language spoken in the Circum-Caribbean regions are: Classic Taíno, Kalínago (formerly known as Island Carib), Garífuna, Lokono, and Wayuu. The latter four are strikingly similar, so it can be easily deduced that they are closely related. For example, the word for "grandfather" in all five Arawakan languages are remarkably similar:

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[1] From Wikipedia, 2011

Taíno	Arocoti
Kalínago	Argouti
Lokono	Dokothi
Wayuu	Atushi
Garífuna	Aruguti

Taíno—Problems with the name

The word "*taíno*" and its changing use across the past five centuries pose some very interesting problems and challenges. For example, the historic interpretation of the name was that "*taíno*" means "good people" or "noble people." In fact, Spaniards associated the name "*taíno*" with "Good Indians" v. the "Bad Caribs." It must also be noted that the term was first coined by archaeologists, most of whom today feel that the peoples of the Caribbean were too diverse to be called by a single collective name. As diverse as Indigenous cultures were across the Caribbean, however, there were also striking similarities: biological, cultural, linguistic, and religious similarities. All the Indigenous Caribbean people spoke a native Arawakan language except for the Ciguayo, Ciboney, and Guanahatabey of the Northeastern Dominican Republic and Cuba, respectively.

The morphology of the name is said to be: *tai* = good, and *no* = people; therefore, the meaning is the good people or the noble people. This rather romantic interpretation of the name, however, is highly suspect. The prefix "*tai-*" is not found in any of the closely related Arawakan languages of the Circum-Caribbean region.

The words for "good" in the various Arawakan languages are as follows:

LOKONO	*san*		Language found in Guyana, Surinam, and Venezuela
GARÍFUNA	*buiti*		Language found in Honduras, Belize, Nicaragua, and Guatemala—Originally from the Caribbean
WAYUU or Goajiro	*anaa*		Language found in the Goajiro Peninsula of Colombia and in Venezuela
KALÍNAGO	*lao or tao*		Language from the island of Dominica
TAÍNO	*tayno* (?)		Native language of the Greater Antilles but also used throughout the Caribbean as a *lingua franca* (trade language)

The Lord´s Prayer

In *Prehistoria de Puerto Rico*, written in 1898 by Cayetano Coll y Toste, one of the first works ever produced about the Taíno language, the author included an imagined " Lord´s Prayer," in what the author believed the Taino language structure would be.:. Here it is, below:

Taíno/English: *Guakia Baba* (Our father), *turey toca* (in the heavens), *Guami-ke-ni* (Lord [of] Land [and] Water), *Guami-caraya-guey* (Lord [of] Moon [and] Sun), *guarico* (come [to]), *guakíá* (us), *tayno-ti* (good/high), *bo-matún;* (big/generous), *busicá* (give [to]), *guakiá* (us), *para yucubia* (rain/plant), *aje-casabi;* (tubers/bread), *juracán-uá* (evil spirits no, no), *maboya-uá* (phantoms NO), *jukiyú-jan;* (good spirit, yes), *Diosá* (God´s),*nabori daca* (servant, I am), *jan-jan catú* (as it shall be).

Taíno/Spanish: *Guakia Baba* (Nuestro padre), *turey toca* (cielo estar), *Guami-ke-ni* (Señor [de] tierra [y] agua), *guami-caraya-guey* (Señor [de] luna [y] sol), *guarico* (ven [a]), *guakíá* (nosotros), *tayno-ti* (bueno/alto), *bo-matún;* (grande/generoso), *busicá* (da [a]), *guakiá* (nosotros), *para yucubia* (lluvia/planta), *aje-casabi;* (boniato/pan), *juracán-uá* (espíritu malo NO), *maboya-uá* (fantasma no), *jukiyú-jan;* (espíritu bueno sí), *Diosá* (de Dios), *nabori daca* (siervo yo), *jan-jan catú* (así sea).

In this example, the word "jan" (or "han") is used to denote either "yes" or "good." "Jan" appears to be similar to the Lokono word "san," which means "good." Therefore the prefix "tai-" does not mean "good."

Constantine Samuel Rafinuesque-Schmaltz and the word "*Taíno*" that will not go away

Constantine Samuel Rafinuesque-Schmaltz (1783-1840) from Galata, a suburb of Constantinople, was a self-educated scholar. He was one of the first to suggest that Native Americans had originated in Asia and crossed the Bering Straits to North America. In 1836, four years before his death, he wrote several chapters in *The American Nations,* where he states as a fact that: "Their collective proper name is Taíno." He further states that the word "*taíno*" referred to other related peoples collectively known as "*guaitiaos*."[2] To date, this is the first known modern usage of the term "*taíno*" to denote the native peoples of the region. Later adopted by scholars of different philosophies, in particular archaeology, the name stuck and has been used by many scholars ever since.

The question arises, where did Rafinuesque-Schmaltz get the idea that Taíno was the name of the Native people? What were his sources? And why did the name stick so readily?

C.S. Rafinuesque-Schmaltz did not invent the name Taíno, his sources were mainly the following:

a) Christopher Columbus´s Logs

b) Pedro de Anglería

c) Dr. Chanca—*The Chanca Letters*

d) Raymond Breton—1647 *Relations de l'Ile de la Guadeloupe*; 1665 *Dictionnaire Caraïbe-François*; 1666 *Dictionnaire François-Caraïbe;* 1667 *Grammaire Caraïbe*.

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[2] Samuel Constantine Rufinesque, *The American Nations: Outlines of their general histories, ancient and modern*, "Haytian Anals," page 163.

Let´s briefly examine Rafinuesque-Schmaltz ´s main sources for the answer to our question:

a) <u>Christopher Columbus and the Nitaíno</u>

Columbus wrote: "Since the canoes go rapidly with oars, they went on ahead to inform the Cacique that we were coming. I have not been sure up to now whether the word ´*Cacique*´ meant King or Governor. They also have another word for noblemen, *Nitayno*. I do not know if this means Hidalgo, governor, or judge.**"[3]** The Europeans were clearly not sure what the term meant—and understandably so. The assumption that it meant a royal class of people, since the individuals in question were dressed rather elaborately, as was their host, "King" Guacanagarí, was a natural mistake, a mistake that has caused much controversy over the centuries. This was, in fact, Columbus´s first voyage to the Caribbean, and both the Europeans and Indigenous peoples had little in common. Indeed, Arawakan languages and Spanish are from completely different language families, and Columbus was interested mainly in two things: routes that would lead him to the West Indies and obtaining lots of gold. In the account quoted above, he clearly associated the word "*nitaíno*" with "*hidalgo*" ("nobleman") for no other reason than that it evoked in his mind a similarity to differences in dress between commoners and noblemen in Europe. Perhaps he was consciously looking for royalty in order to establish trade relations.

In any event, because of Columbus´s error, to this very day, most people believe that "*nitayno*" means noblemen. As stated earlier, Columbus made many such errors and misinterpretations.

b) <u>Dr. Diego Chanca and the people on the beach at Guadalupe:</u>

Dr. Chanca was a physician appointed by the Spanish Crown to accompany Christopher Columbus on his second trip to the Americas in 1493. It was Dr. Chanca who heard the word "*Tayno*" for the second time in the Americas: "On this first day of our landing, several men and women came to the beach up to the water's edge and gazed at the ship in astonishment at so novel a sight; and when a boat pushed on shore in order to speak with them; they cried out, ´Tayno, Tayno!,´ which is as much as to say, ´Good, good!,´ and waited for the landing of the sailors…"[4]

For more than 500 years most people have accepted the fact that "*Taíno*" means "good/noble people." If so, why would the natives have shouted out, "Good people, good people!" upon the approach of the Spanish ships?

Speculations: On Columbus's first trip, he returned to Spain with Native Taíno people. Did he return in 1493 with some of those Natives on board? They would have learned some Spanish in the year they were in Spain, making them excellent translators, or at least better than the European translators whom Columbus had with him on his first voyage.

On his second voyage, the one where Dr. Chanca recorded hearing Natives yelling out, "Tayno, tayno!" it is entirely plausible that the people on the shores of Guadalupe, upon seeing recognizable Native people on the deck of the ship, may have shouted, "Relatives, relatives!" Of course, the people of Guadalupe were the so-called "Caribs," considered by the Spaniards to be cannibals and enemies of the peoples of the Greater Antilles. (Today we know that the "Caribs," who call themselves Kalínago, were, in fact, Arawakan speakers.) As reported by Columbus and others who accompanied him, most Indians

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[3] *Journals and other documents on the life and voyages of Christopher Columbus*, page 133.
[4] *American Journeys Collection*, "The Letter of Dr. Chanca on the Second Voyage of Columbus."

fled at the sight of Spanish ships, but here, on the island that today is called Guadalupe, they approached shouting a term that appears to mean "my relatives."[5]

c) Pedro Mártir de Anglería and the Spanish Sailors´ Accounts:

Pedro Mártir de Anglería (as his Italian name was written in Spanish) was an Italian historian born in 1457 who was appointed under Ferdinand and Isabella as teacher to the noble children of the Royal Court of Spain. Anglería never set foot in the New World and was not an eyewitness to the events occurring in the "Indies"; however, he had access to the sailors returning to Spain from those explorations. He interviewed and recorded statements fresh from the memories of returning sailors, compared notes, and found commonalities within their stories, then he wrote about them in letters and reports to his friends back in Rome. In 1520, he received the official post of Chronicler (*cronista*) in the newly formed Council of the Indies, commissioned by Charles V. himself, the Holy Roman Emperor, to continue describing the occurrences and discoveries in the Empire´s vast new territories. In 1530, just after his death, his writings were gathered together in a series of ten informative chapters about the explorations and discoveries during the decades from 1511 to 1530, which were published as books titled, *De Orbe Novo* (*On the New World*).

Anglería reported the following event: "They [Spanish sailors] were met by a man with a wrinkled forehead and frowning brows who was escorted by 100 warriors armed with bows and arrows, pointed lances, and clubs. He advanced menacingly toward them. ´Taíno´ the natives cried, that is to say, good men, not cannibals."

This incident seems to imply that the word was an identifier, one that supposedly (according to the Spaniards) differentiated this man and others like him from the Taínos´ natural enemies, the so-called Caribs. This is the third time the name "*Taíno*" appears in the chronicles, this time in an identical manner to the word heard by Dr. Chanca and used in much the same way. Therefore, it appears that when Taíno met strangers, they would quickly and naturally identify themselves as "*Taíno*" to others. In the Chanca example, the Indians apparently were either in distress or welcoming when shouting the name "*Tayno*." In Anglería´s account, the Indians were armed, thus needed reassurance from the Spaniards that they would not be attacked. Since the word was heard on more than one island and in all accounts of first encounters, we may conclude:

- The name was used throughout the Caribbean, but we do not know its true or exact meaning.

- The Indigenous people may have felt a need to make distinctions between themselves and their supposed rivals, the Caribs.

- The word "*Tayno*" is from the Taíno language. It was appropriated by scholars and, in time, became synonymous with the Indigenous peoples of the Caribbean Region.

- The Spaniards, French, English, and other Europeans heard the same Indigenous languages, yet recorded them phonetically how the words sounded to them; therefore, there are different spellings in the records. This is not uncommon.

d) Raymond Breton and the Kalínago/Carib Connection

The Kalínago people of the Lesser Antilles, specifically the island of Dominica, where there is the only Indigenous Reservation in all the Caribbean, were at one time mistakenly called "Caribs." An

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[5] Theory posited by Ace Goaconax Vazquez (of Higuayagua) during a Facebook discussion.

analysis of their language structure, however, places them in the Arawakan language group. It must be noted that the so-called Island Carib, themselves, were descendants of Cariban speakers who migrated from South America. Some say they migrated in pursuit of Arawakan enemies, or perhaps for the same motivations that led Arawak-speakers to move northward and eastward up the chain of Caribbean islands. (Most scholars suggest it was over-population pressures on the continent.)

Carib warriors were said to be warlike in contrast to the "peaceful" Taíno, often raiding Taíno villages, mostly for female captives. It is easy to imagine that groups of Carib men would leave the South American mainland without their families and capture women along their path. These women remained on the islands the Caribs settled as they moved northwestward up the Antillean chain, while the men raided Taíno- and other Carib-held islands. The women mostly continued to speak Arawakan-based languages while the men spoke principally Cariban.

Raymond Breton (1609-1679), a French linguist and friar of the Dominican Order, lived among the Kalínago (Caribs) for ten years. During this time, he recorded the Carib language in detail. The linguist Douglas Taylor, however, later revised Breton´s work and concluded that the language Breton had recorded was mostly Arawakan with only a sprinkling of Carib words. Thus Kalínago was geographically closer and perhaps linguistically closer as well to Classic Taíno.

The Kalínago use two very important words that appear to verify our hypothesis. These words are, "*nitegnon*" and "*tegnon*," pronounced "ni-ta-igno" and "ta-igno," both meaning "relative." In Carib proper, the word for relative is "*ibaounale*," whereas Breton clearly recorded that the women of Dominica used *nitegnon* and *tegnon*.[6]

Another interesting word is "*ouatiaon*," (pronounced wai-tea-aon) by our friend Reyes, which is quite similar to classic Taíno "*waitiao*," meaning "a name exchange that creates a ´family´ relationship between two unrelated people."

It is quite clear that "*nitaíno*" has its counterpart in Kalínago, and again, the only difference is the Spanish interpretation of the word versus the Indian meaning.

Breton wrote that: "Some but not all nouns referring to animate beings take a pluralizing suffix, which occurs in the same variants as does the personal suffix of third plural: for example Breton's *cáintium ouacánium gaitiu uáganiu* "our enemies are angry" (again "enemy"). So also *iraáhoia* "children," from *ifraho* "child"; *hiariu* "women," from *hiaru*,"woman"; *eieriu* "men" from *eiri* "man"; *niduheiu* "my kinsmen,", from *niduhe* "my kinsmen/kinswoman"; *nitunu* "my sisters," from *nitu* "my sisters"; *nibirie,* "my younger brothers," from *nibiri* , etc…."

Unfortunately, today there are no fluent speakers of the Kalínago language, which had its origins in Arawakan, Ta-Arawakan, Igneri, and Island Carib or the Cariban languages. There may be remnants of it, however, in the Garífuna language.

The Garífuna language and those who speak it

The Garífuna people and their language originated in the 1600s from a mixture of Carib Indians in the Lesser Antilles (who call themselves Kalínago) and escaped African slaves.

Legend has it that two British slaves ships ran aground in St. Lucia around 1635 (or between 1664 and 1670, depending upon which report one reads). The African slaves rebelled and were quickly

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[6] These words and pronunciations, as well other in this seccion, were provided during private email conversations between Jorge Estevez and the Garífuna linguist and historian Dr. Ruben Reyes, a native Garífuna speaker.

joined by the Carib Natives, who were watching. The Caribs then adopted the African slaves. Not having a common language, the Africans quickly learned the Carib language, adapted to their culture, and married into the Native families in order to survive—they became known as the Black Caribs. (Other Kalínago in the area, who did not mix with the Africans, were known as Yellow Caribs.) Unable to subdue these mixed-blood people, the British began deporting all of the Black Caribs to Central America, where more than 300,000 live today. They are the only Native peoples of the Caribbean who still speak an Indigenous language; it is also spoken in Belize, Honduras, Nicaragua's Miskito Coast, and the island of Dominica. It is said that up to 70% of the Garífuna language is Arawakan, 20% Carib, and 10% other. Thus it is one of the closest languages to Classic Taíno still spoken today. There is no doubt, however, that various African words, cadences, and other speech patterns have affected the language as it is spoken today.

In June 2011, a conference was held for the Caribbean Indigenous Legacies Project at the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, D.C. In attendance were various authorities on Taíno culture and history. One speaker, Dr. Joseph Palacios, a fluent Garífuna (Arawakan language) speaker from Honduras, noted that the term "*nitaíno*" seemed eerily similar to the Garífuna word "*nidihenu*" or "*nidianu*," whose translation means "relative."

This intriguing bit of information led us to ask other Garífuna speakers their opinion on the word "*nitaíno*" as we understand it and what it means in their own branch of the Arawakan language. One Garífuna linguist who was instrumental in this investigation is Dr. Ruben Reyes from Honduras. Below is an email correspondence from him:

> *Níbiri* Jorge Estevez,
>
> It is always a pleasure to hear from you with this very interesting topic about the name "Taíno." I have done very little research on the word itself. One of the sites I searched was Merriam-Webster Dictionary. The finding is that the word "*niduheñu*" used by Dr. Joseph Palacio has possible application to Taíno. I am including other words that have similarities between Taíno and Garífuna. You can then see that "*nitaíno*" suffers changes like other words in order to become a Garífuna word. Let's keep in mind that the African tongue, Carib-Taíno-African intermarriages, time, plus regions, are factors of changes in the transition process of this language in particular.
>
> I want to further explain about the possible meaning of this word, "*nitaíno*":
>
> 1. *niduheñu* my family, my people
> 2. *nítainu* my blood people
>
> Breakdown of *niduheñu*.
> *iduhei* relative
> *niduhe* my relative
> *niduheñu* my relatives
>
> Other possible meaning of *nitaíno*:
> *nita* my blood
> **nítainu** my blood people
>
> Breakdown of *nítaina/nítainu*:
> *hitaü* blood

nita my blood

Words that have similar application to this second example (***nítaina/nítainu***)
nibe my kind
níbeina/níbeinu similar to me, plural.

I find "***nitaina/nítainu***" with closer similarity to the Taíno word: "***nitaíno***"

Best Regards, Ruben Reyes

Assuming this explanation by Mr. Ruben Reyes is correct, one thing is certain, "*nitaíno*" in Garífuna, does not translate to "noble class." There must be comparable, equivalent terms for "*taíno*" and "*nitaíno*" in other Arawakan languages. Exploring their vocabulary may also help reveal why the word "*taíno*" was so readily accepted among both the academics and laymen and why the word "*nitaíno,*" which actually appears to mean "relative" or something similar, has been so erroneously accepted as meaning "good or noble people."

Exploring other Arawakan languages

• Lokono language and people
Origins—Northern Ta-Arawakan, Arawakan
Region—Guianas, Surinam, and Venezuela
Speakers today—2,500

The Lokono people refer to their language as Lokono Dian, meaning "people talk." It is important to note that although this Arawakan language is strikingly similar to Spanish accounts of the Taíno language, there are also some very important differences. For example, Spaniards speculated that "*taíno/nitaíno"* both meant "good and or noble." In Lokono, however, the word for noble is "*katua*."

In the course of this study, we had the good fortune to be introduced to a fluent Lokono speaker, Ivan Cornelius, from the village of Wakapoa in Guyana. Ivan said that the word "*Taíno"* sounded similar to him to "*waiono*," which means "family" in his Lokono branch of the language. He also introduced the word "*isaino*," meaning "friend." Assuming this fluent speaker is correct, then we can conclude that:

1) *Nitaíno* does not translate to "noble class" or "noblemen."

2) *Isaino* and *waiono* both sound similar to *nitaíno* and basically express kinship or friendship, just as in Garífuna.

• Wayuu/Goajiro language and people
Origins—Northern Arawakan, Ta-Arawakan, Wayuu
Region—Guajira Peninsula between Venezuela and Columbia
Speakers today—320,000

The Wayuu people, also known as Goajiro or Washiro, speak Wayuunaiki, a branch of the Arawakan language group. They live on the Goajira Peninsula between Colombia and Venezuela and are the largest Indigenous group in both countries. Never subjugated by the Spaniards, they lived in a constant state of

war up through the late 1700s, and most still speak their Native tongue, although most young Wayuu today speak Spanish, too, in addition to Wayuuniki.

In 2013, a group of Garífuna speakers led by the Garífuna linguist, Dr. Ruben Reyes, visited with Wayuu people and was astonished that they could readily communicate with their Maipuran-speaking relatives, demonstrating just how closely related all these languages are. In the Wayuu language, the word "*nutano*" means "relative" or "my relative." It is very similar to "*nitaíno*."

• Tupi-Guaraní connection?
Origins—Tupian; **Sub-divisons—**Guaraní, Guarayu, Tupi, Teneteharan, Kawahib- Kaiowa
Region—Brazil, Bolivia, French Guina, Peru

Tupi-Guaraní is not related to Arawakan, according to linguistic specialists, who say that Tupi is closer to Cariban than to Arawak. Extensive linguistic borrowing, however, has taken place throughout the Caribbean, Central America, and northern South America over the past centuries, so we notice that certain similar words can be found in both Arawak and Tupi-Guaraní. One important word from Guaraní is "*tiehi*" or "*tiyi,*" which means "clan, lineage or tribe." Curiously, these words sound similar to "*nitinon*" a Kalínago word meaning "friend."

Did the Taíno speak Nu-Arawak, Ta-Arawak, or something else?

Perhaps "*nitaíno*" could have meant "our river relatives." After all, the prefix "*ni-*" means "water or river," and "*taíno,*" with the meaning of "friend/relative," is indeed both plausible and fits our hypothesis. A linguistic problem, however, arises within this context:

In Ta-Arawakan, the form of the first-person pronoun 'I' is "*ta*." This is true in the Circum-Caribbean region for Lokono, Wayuu, Taíno, and other Arawkan-based languages. In other Arawakan languages "I" is "*nu*." This is the basis for the classification of Arawak languages into Nu-Arawak and Ta-Arawak.[7] Thus "*ni*" and "*nu*" in the form of the first person do not fit into Ta-Arawakan, where "I" is "*daka,*" "*dacha,*" or "*dakia*," and so on. The question thus becomes, how could the Classic Taíno, being Ta-Arawakan speakers, use "*nu*" in the first person? Douglas Taylor states: "Mason tells us that in Arawakan languages, "the first person pronoun is usually *nu*, whence the generic name Nu-Arawak. Whereas Lokono has *dakia dai* (and affixial dA- and -da, v. Island Carib´s nV- and -na), Goajiro has *taya* (and tA-), and Taíno has variously spelt *dacha*, *daga*, *daca* (and dA-). These latter forms (those beginning with an apical stop) would therefore appear to be innovating as compared with the former (beginning with n), among which are those of far-away Campa (*nu*) and Amesha (*na*)."

The Classic Taíno did not speak a "single" language, but rather several distinct dialects of Arawak that were mutually intelligible.

The Greater Antillean region was not even purely Arawakan. Academics speculate that the Guanahatabey people of Western Cuba may have arrived from North America or even from the Yucatan thousands of years ago, but there is no record of their language. The same may be said of Ciboney, who lived in Cuba as well as in Southwestern Hispaniola (today the Republic of Haiti). On Hispaniola, there were also Taíno, Macorix, and Ciguayo. Julian Granberry states that the Macorix and Ciguayo peoples and their languages were distinct from one another, according to witnesses of the period. He further

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[7] For a general language background on the Carribean and Circum-Caribbean Region, see: *Comparative Arawakan histories: Rethinking language family and cultural área in Amazonia*, edited by J.D. Hill and F. Santos Granero; *Languages of the Precolumbian Antilles*, by J. Granberry and G. Vescelius; *Languages of the West Indies*, by D. Taylor; and *La Guaraní Civilización* by M. Santiago Bertoni.

believes that Ciguayo may have been the remnant of a much earlier language of the island, possibly of Tolan origin, which is a native tongue in Central America. The Macorix may have been Warao speakers.

Linguists can trace back to when certain groups split from others linguistically. Archaeologists and geneticists, on the other hand, affirm that there were at least two great migrations into the Caribbean region. This implies that Nu-Arawakan and Ta-Arawakan could have been spoken independently in a shared space as well as a mixture of the two.

We posit that it is entirely possible that both Nu- and Ta-Arawakan were spoken in the Caribbean. Although examples are beyond the scope of this paper, this hypothesis would not be that difficult to research. One may find, for example, that Kalínago and Garífuna, although having a common origin, diverged, yet words from both languages can be very similar as well as very different. Kalínago tends to show more similarity with Lokono. Lokono, on the other hand, has many differences when compared to Wayuu. Yet Wayuu can be understood by Garífuna speakers! In the midst of all this is Taíno. Although there is not enough linguistic data to confirm if the Taíno language is closer to Lokono, Wayuu, Kalínago or Garífuna, the words and phrases we do have suggest that it was similar to all of them. It is easy to imagine some Taíno as Nu-Arawakan speakers while others (and perhaps the majority) were Ta-Arawakan speakers.

In October 2015, I (Jorge Estevez) visited the museum at the La Isabela National Park in the Dominican Republic. This was the site of the first Spanish settlement in the Americas. Both Taíno and Spanish remains have been found there. The town lies in the center of the chiefdom belonging to the Taíno Cacique Guacanagarí, who welcomed Columbus to the island. The director of this museum, Diana Peña-Bastalla, commented that they had unearthed pottery in the area from different cultural groups, including Chicoide (Classic Taíno), Mellicoide (a branch of Taíno culture that developed in the Cibao Valley and traveled to Cuba and Jamaica, in the process giving rise to the so called "Sub-Taíno" culture), as well as pottery showing both Chican and Mellican influence, all within a single Classic Taíno chiefdom! This implies that there was a great mixture of culture, religiosity, politics, and language among the Natives of the island. So, how different were these groups from one another?

It is possible that part of the problem that exists when viewing the Caribbean is to think of its cultural areas, religiosity, and languages as existing in boxes or blocks. The late great archaeologist Irving Rouse's hypothesis of the peopling of the Caribbean certainly does this. The reality, however, is that groups living side by side borrowed heavily from each other, as has already been suggested. Thus Classic Taíno would have and probably did have both Nu and Ta linguistic influences.

TERMS FOR "FRIEND," " RELATIVE" & "SIBLINGS" IN VARIOUS ARAWAKAN LANGUAGES			
Garífuna	*nidihenu, nidainu,*	=	relatives/kinsmen

Garífuna	*niduhe*	=	my kinsmen/kinswoman
Garífuna	*se-tano*	=	group of people
Lokono	*isaino*	=	friend
Lokono	*waiono*	=	relatives
Lokono	*da'yono*		my comrades
Kalínago	*nitegnon (ni-ta-igno)*	=	relatives
Kalínago	*tegnon (ta-igno)*	=	relative
Kalínago	*nitunu*	=	my sisters
Kalínago	*nitu*	=	sister
Kalínago	*nitinon*	=	friend
Wayuu	*nutano*	=	son, family
Taíno	*nitaíno*	=	noble class?
Taíno	*tayni*	=	good?
Taíno	*waitiao*	=	friend
Kalínago	*ouaition (wai-tiaon)*	=	friend
Wayuu	*wale*	=	friend
Guarani	*tiehi* or *tiyi*	=	clan, lineage, tribe

Conclusion:

We may never know for certain just exactly what our Classic Taíno ancestors´ word "*nitaíno*" meant to them. We can, however, make some strong assertions.

Given the multitude of Indigenous chiefdoms, villages, and communities Caribbean-wide, it makes absolutely no sense that there was one single name for the people we call Taíno today. They were a very large, diverse, and widely dispursed population comprising non-tribal, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural groups of people whom anthropologists say were on the cusp of evolving into a nation-state when Spaniards arrived on the scene and put a screeching halt to their political, economic, and cultural expansion. Their languages were Arawakan-based, and their landscape the Caribbean islands. Due to close (but dispersed) proximity to each other, the individual groups must have appeared quite similar to each other in the eyes of the Spaniards. No doubt there were regional, even island-wide differences, but their substantial similarities to each other were more obvious to the Europeans.

As already stated, the Classic Taíno did not live in tribes but rather chiefdoms, which were highly complex, and one can imagine that societies such as this would probably have fluid identities, thus making it nearly impossible to pinpoint an exact ethnic designation.

American Indians across the Western Hemisphere recognized related people, and still do—this is fact. Warfare has occasionally arisen among different groups, but there has also been keen recognition among them as allegiances and territories shifted over time, recognition supported by peace agreements made among the various groups´ leaders via marriage and other relationship-cementing methods such as becoming "blood-brothers" or the bloodless *guatiao* ceremony, both of which create strong family ties, just as binding as the family ties created by birth and marriage. Take, for example, the O'odham people of Southern Arizona and Mexico. These people were not tribal until the United States government rounded them up and placed them on reservations. Some lived in the desert country, while others lived near rivers. Residing in family units, they would come together as a collective group when fighting off their Apache and Navajo enemies. They refer to themselves as O'odham, but are known as either *Tohono O'odham* (Desert People) or Akimel O'odham (River People).

In 2003, I was invited to attend an Encuentro Yoreme, a Native gathering in Sinaloa, Mexico. At this grand event, Native Americans from Alaska to South America, as well as Pacific islanders, are invited to a two-week event where they perform their native dances, share their cuisine, arts and crafts, and other aspects of their respective Indigenous cultures. I had the pleasure of interacting with Mr. Bernardo Esquer López of the Mayo people. The Mayo are considered to be Southern Yaqui, since they and the Yaqui share the same language and culture. They collectively call themselves "*Yoreme*." During one of our many lengthy conversations, Bernardo Esquer stated: "When Yorem in the North fought the Apache, we would receive word of this in Sonora and prepare to do battle, as the Apache are enemies to all Yorem." I was a bit perplexed by his statement, as I believed (correctly) that the Mayo villages did not extend into Arizona or Texas. Bernardo Esquer then explained that to the Yoreme, all related peoples who understand their language are called Yorem. Thus the Comanche and others were Yorem—relatives. At least this is how I understood what he said. He also said that he could easily understand the O'odham, Pima, Comanche, Shosone, and Pauite or Seri peoples´ languages.

This led me to speculate that perhaps the Taíno peoples may have had a similar structure. Perhaps there was an epicenter where the so-called "Classic Taíno" lived (Dominican Republic/Haiti and Puerto Rico), and perhaps other related peoples (as the Taíno expanded and conquered or absorbed other groups) lived within and near the perimeters of Classic Taíno society. There must have been a collective name for all similar, related peoples, probably extending to allies and even conquered groups.

Such a collective name is most likely linked to the connection between the words "*taíno*" and "*nitaíno.*" It is quite possible that the Spaniards heard both this terms and recorded them, though not understanding that one was used to identify relatives and/or allies, so it was closely linked to the collective name Taíno. There is no question that both words were used by the peoples whom we call Taíno today. Furthermore, words that are phonetically similar are to be found in the languages of the closest relatives to the Taíno: Garífuna, Kalínago, Lokono, and Wayuu. As we have carefully noted, in these related Indigenous languages, "*nitaíno*" and its derivatives mean "relative," but Spaniards recorded the word as meaning "noblemen." Nonetheless, as seen through the examples provided in this research (and there are many more examples) "*nitaíno*" was not and could not have been a class of noblemen. That conclusion obviously came from Spaniards projecting their own society and its class divisions onto what they thought they saw was the same system among the Indigenous Caribbean peoples. Neither Christopher Columbus nor the Spaniards and other Europeans who sailed with him were linguists, they were adventurers searching for gold, and for kingdoms and monarchs with whom to establish trade relations.

In the past, researchers had to wait days, weeks, or even months in order to receive copies of books, letters, or articles to assist in the investigation of a topic. Or they had to visit libraries across their

countries or abroad. Today, however, we have the Internet—information at your fingertips, albeit not always reliable. Through the Internet´s social media, we are able to connect to actual Wayuu, Garífuna, or Lokono speakers, who are then able to confirm or deny for us any questions related to any given linguistic hypothesis. This is one of the methods we employed for this article. Not to discount the great work that various linguists have done in the past and are still doing, but it stands to reason that a linguist whose expertise is, for example, the Lokono language, does not understand said language better than a native speaker of that language. Indeed, we must use both sources in order to create a clearer picture of unclear linguistic paths.

One thing is certain, we are closer to the truth than ever before and it all points to *"Taíno"* being a collective identifier for the Indigenous Circum-Caribbean peoples of Arawakan-based speech. Note that this hypothesis is not new. Raymond Breton, for example, had come to similar conclusions pertaining to this subject in the late 1600s, as he stated in the collection entitled, *Comparative Arawakan Histories, Rethinking Language Family and Cultural Area in Amazonia*.

To repeat some of the key points that this article wishes to make:

- *"Taíno"* was not the tribal name of individual chiefdoms.

- The Classic Taíno were multi-cultural, multi-ethnic groups of peoples, who were, nonetheless, extremely similar to each other due to living collectively on the islands for some 6,000 years or more.

- *"Nitaíno"* and the closely linked term *"taíno"* are the collective identifiers for all related peoples in the Caribbean, be they clans, family, extended family, close friends, and perhaps allies.

- *"Nitaíno"* was not a class of noblemen, but rather an exploratory greeting in the same vein, for example, as when a Latino person asks another, "Are you Hispanic? (*¿Eres hispano*"?

- The words *"taíno"* and *"nitaíno"* come from the Tainan language.

- Due to all of the above, the application of the name Taíno and its current use to identify the Indigenous peoples of the Caribbean and their closely related languages is the best word we have to describe the Classic Taíno peoples and their descendants. And most importantly, the term does indeed fit.

- Only by cross checking many of the Indigenous words that survived the European Conquest of the Circum-Caribbean or that were recorded by the Spanish Chroniclers, along with words from other Arawakan languages, can we begin to truly decipher the rich language of our ancestors.

We plan to continue these linguistic investigations into the various Indigenous languages of the Caribbean and Circum-Caribbean—and we seek the help of professional linguists, laymen with similar interests, and especially Native speakers, with the multiple aims of recording for posterity these disappearing languages, better understanding our ancestors, and carrying on their rich and extensive cultural legacy.

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